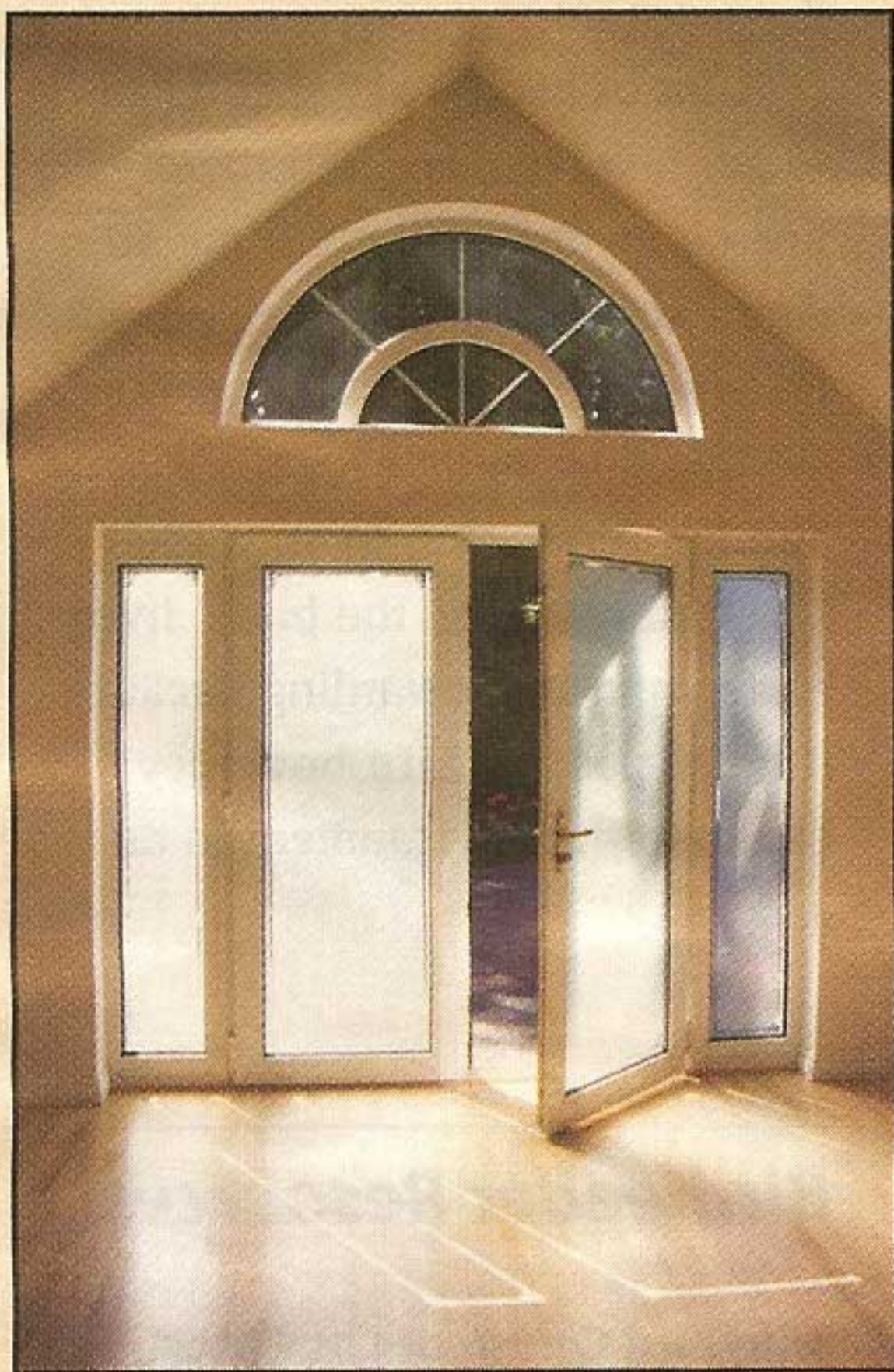


DESIGNER FYI: remodeling vs. refurbishing



By Kris Linder

Remodeling your home obviously is a big decision. When embarking on any major home project, you should give serious thought to answering these two important questions: "Are you planning to stay in your house for at least a minimum of five or 10 years?" and "What is your budget?" The answers will help you determine if a thorough remodel is in order, or whether a lesser-scale refurbishment is sufficient.

Let's start with the remodel scenario. For easier understanding, I will describe a bathroom remodel, but the philosophy applies to any room in the house.

In the remodel decision, the bathroom may require complete demolition and you may have to bump out a few other walls if you want to make the

room larger. Architectural design and space planning will have been approved prior to any actual construction. Working drawings, engineering reports and permits have been procured. A lot of time and effort — and considerable dollars — have been put into the pre-planning and architectural/construction details.

With this scheme, you can indulge in higher ceilings, additional windows and

French doors; upgrade to new sinks and tubs; place your counters wherever you desire; and add all the bells and whistles you can think of. Your cabinets can be any style and size, your shower can be a two-person model or spa/steam shower, your tub a large Jacuzzi with views of your beautiful garden, and a big skylight can let natural light flood in. The possibilities are truly endless. By making the room larger and moving elements around, the cost goes up considerably. The finished room is all new, and with the right designer and contractor, it will be stunning. This is the best choice if you are planning to stay in your home for five years or longer.

Refurbishing (or updating) does not require space planning or architectural drawings. There may be some detail sketches for design purposes, but that will be the extent of your architectural pre-planning. The footprint of the room remains the same — the tub, toilet, shower and counters are still in the same position. This is called "replacement updating" and does not usually require a permit (but check with your contractor just to be safe). The cabinets are usually repainted if they're in good enough condition, and sometimes new doors and drawers are installed.

New sinks, faucets and counters can be installed, along with new shower doors, tile (if used) and flooring. Other accessories can include new mirrors, lighting, wall and window treatments. An updated bathroom can be equally as beautiful as a remodeled one, and can be done for as little as half the cost and time. The downside is that you still have the same bathroom and might not be able to incorporate all the bells and whistles you might have liked.

The choice to remodel or refurbish is best determined by your personal requirements and your use-to-value ratio for the future. Talking to a professional can help you make the appropriate choice, and also ensure the completed project is everything you dreamed it would be.

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